

In many of our private meetings together over the last 3 years, Bill Perry would always—always—bring up the welfare, the morale, the interests, and the future of our men and women in uniform who are enlisted personnel and their families. Secretary Perry's many trips abroad—and as the most traveled Defense Secretary in the history of the United States, there were many trips—were as much about checking in with our troops and their families and checking on their quality of life as they were about meeting with defense ministers and military leaders in other lands.

As a former private, his heart never left the members of the enlisted corps. As a former lieutenant, he understood the leadership demands we place upon our junior officers. But above all, he understood that whether enlisted or officer, military service is the ultimate expression of patriotism by those who choose to wear our uniform.

I will miss Bill Perry for many things, for his thoughtful temperament and manner, for speaking with the mathematician's unadorned clarity, a rarity in Washington. Teddy Roosevelt said that those of us in positions of authority should speak softly and carry a big stick. Bill Perry spoke softly and carried the biggest stick in the world with great care and a great effect. His quiet confidence was always an incredible comfort to me. There were qualities which our allies relied upon, and as long as he was Secretary of Defense, I never went to bed a single

night worried about the security of the United States or the welfare of our men and women in uniform. His practice of bipartisanship earned Bill Perry the trust and respect of the Congress and the American people as well as credibility abroad as an American who could speak for the entire country.

Many of you know that Secretary Perry's personal hero is his predecessor General George Marshall. During the crisis days of World War II, Marshall lived right here at Fort Myer and then went on to become a great Secretary of State and the third Secretary of Defense. While Bill Perry is one of just 16 to follow him in that difficult job, I believe he is the successor George Marshall would be most proud of.

The measure of a great Defense Secretary is whether he leaves our military stronger and our Nation safer than on the day he took office. It is, and we are.

And so it is my great privilege as President, as Commander in Chief, and as a grateful American citizen, to present William J. Perry with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Nation's highest civilian award.

Commander, publish the order.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:40 a.m. in Conmy Hall. In his remarks, he referred to General Shalikashvili's wife, Joan, and Secretary Perry's wife, Leonilla. Following the President's remarks, Spec. John Christ, USA, 3d U.S. Infantry (the Old Guard), read the citation.

Statement on the National Economy *January 14, 1997*

Today's Consumer Price Index report makes clear that 1996 was an exceptional year for the economy in terms of low inflation and low unemployment. Indeed, the report confirms that the combined rate of unemployment and inflation, the so-called misery index, was lower in 1996 than in any year since 1968. We also learned that in the last 3 years we have had stronger real average hourly wage growth than during any 3-year period in nearly two decades

(1976–1978). Moreover, the core inflation rate in 1996 was as low as any year since 1965.

This is good news for the American people and more evidence that our economic strategy is working. Now is the time to work together in a bipartisan fashion and build on our success. That's why we will continue our efforts to reduce the deficit to zero, expand trade, and increase educational opportunities.

Statement on 1997 Appropriations for the Immigration and Naturalization Service

January 14, 1997

For many years, the Immigration and Naturalization Service did not receive sufficient resources to carry out some of its vital functions. As a result, control of our borders suffered and illegal immigration flourished.

Four years ago, we began an effort to revitalize the INS by providing the resources and commitment to fulfill our responsibilities. During this period, INS funding has grown 105 percent. Our borders have been greatly strengthened with more personnel and better technology,

workplace enforcement has gotten tougher, and a record number of criminal aliens have been deported.

Today's announcement represents continuing wise management of the additional resources requested by me and provided by the Congress. And it represents my administration's continuing commitment to an immigration policy that recognizes the value of legal immigration while strengthening our efforts to restrict illegal immigration.

Remarks on the Israeli-Palestinian Agreement on Hebron and an Exchange With Reporters

January 14, 1997

The President. A few minutes ago, Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman Arafat called me to tell me that they have reached agreement on the Israeli redeployment in Hebron. This achievement brings to a successful conclusion the talks that were launched in Washington last September, and it brings us another step closer to a lasting, secure Middle East peace.

Once again, the Israelis and the Palestinians have shown they can resolve their differences and help to build a brighter future for their children by finding ways to address each other's concerns. And once again, the forces of peace have prevailed over a history of division.

Israel will promptly redeploy its troops. The parties will establish practical security arrangements to strengthen stability and improve cooperation. There will also be an agreed roadmap for further redeployment by Israel. The Palestinians have reaffirmed their commitments, including their commitment to fight terrorism.

I thank Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman Arafat for their leadership. King Hussein also deserves special recognition and gratitude for his work for peace. I also want to express my appreciation to President Mubarak for his support. Finally, let me thank Secretary Christopher, who worked on this all weekend long, and our United States team. And especially let

me thank our Special Middle East Coordinator, Dennis Ross, who has worked so hard and so long to help conclude this agreement.

Today's agreement is not an end in itself. Bringing its words to life will require active and continuous cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian officials. It will demand every effort to stop those who would choose confrontation over cooperation. In short, this is not a time to relax. It is a time to reinforce our commitment to peace.

That's why it is so important that the Israelis and the Palestinians have agreed to continue to work on the remaining issues contained in their agreements. As they do, the United States will do all it can to help. We will do everything we can to build a just and durable peace, a peace that will mean a better life for Israelis, for Palestinians, for all the people of the Middle East.

And now I'd like to ask Mr. Berger to come up here and give you the details from our perspective of what's happened over the last couple weeks.

Q. Sir, if it took so long for this agreement to be worked out, sir, on a relatively minor point of redeploying troops in Hebron, what does—is it a bad omen for the other unresolved issues that they now face?